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ABSTRACT

Higher education is coping with increasing pressures for change, and one of the prime targets for change has been the college curriculum, particularly general education. This paper reviews (1) some of the books written on general education; (2) the difficulties that general education is experiencing because of its stagnation in the face of major social changes; (3) the factors likely to affect the future course of general education, which include the expansion of the proportion of youth attending college, the changing characteristics of these students and of faculty, the increasingly pluralistic mission of colleges and universities, the growing emphasis on disciplines rather than liberal arts as instruments of human development, the growing power of the individual departments, and the decreasing consensus on the means and ends in higher education; (4) those areas that have not changed, such as the undergraduate curriculum, and techniques of college instruction; (5) three periods in the twentieth century evolution of higher education curricula; and (6) some undesirable and some essential qualities of the general education programs of the future. A selected annotated bibliography on general education concludes the report. (AF)

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THE ACADEMY AND GENERAL EDUCATION

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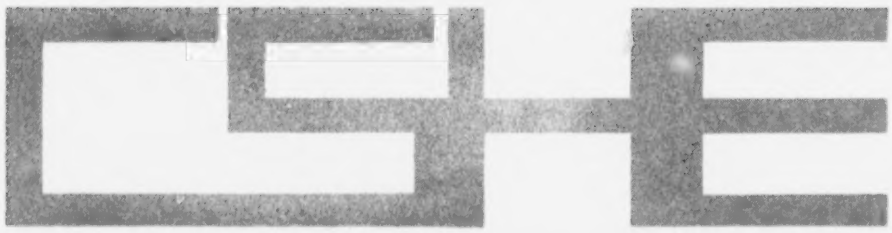

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There is a growing self-consciousness in American colleges and universities as serious attempts are made to understand and to cope with the expanding pressures for change. One of the prime targets for change has been the college curriculum and the bull's eye on that target is general education. More than other elements in the college curriculum, general education's role has been to aid in the transfer of culture from generation to generation; this task has become more difficult, however, as the definition of "culture" has become more elusive. In a period of unparalleled cultural change, general education must also change. The questions of what to change, and how to change, and for what reasons remain largely unasked, and therefore unanswered.

Interestingly, general education may be defined in essentially the same terms as were used over 25 years ago in a study by the American Council on Education: "...general education refers to those phases of nonspecialized and non-vocational education that should be the common denominator, so to speak, of educated persons as individuals and as citizens in a free society [1944, p. 7]." Because of its central and obvious place in the curriculum, general education has received more than its share of attention over the years. Typically, students concentrate on general education courses during most of their first two years in college, although some have argued convincingly

that general education should be the concluding experience of the college career -- not the initial one (Vallance, 1963). General education programs may be operated by a separately organized administrative unit such as a "general" or "basic" college, or courses may be under the control of the conventional academic departments. The program may include specially designed courses such as integrative seminars or survey courses or may be drawn from the standard inventory of introductory offerings of the department. General education courses have been more likely than others to profess a concern for student attitudes and values and for "appreciation" as well as for knowledge, skills and abilities.

McConnell observed that general education evolved as a "movement" to reexamine and revitalize the nature and purpose of liberal education. The early proponents of the movement "believed that correctives were badly needed... [McConnell, 1952, p. 1]." General education was a reaction against "overspecialization," against the pursuit of special, professional or disciplinary interests rather than the "cultivation" of the liberally educated man. It was a reaction against curriculum fragmentation and a longing for wholeness and unity of knowledge, a reaction against the growing power of the sciences and an attempt to reassert the importance of the humanities. McConnell suggested that more than anything else general education was a protest against formalism in liberal education. Harold Taylor, writing in the same volume, considered the philosophical foundations of general education programs and concluded that general education should provide an "orderly and unified system of ideas and values," insist upon "unity, integration and the development of liberal values," and reunite disparate and unrelated elements of the college curriculum (Taylor, 1952, p. 25).

Paul Dressel and Lewis Mayhew (1954) directed a major effort in evaluation of general education, and observed that:

> The general education movement at its inception derived its energy from the fact that it was a protest against the compartmentalization of knowledge and the proliferation of courses, and the associated evil of the free elective system. It developed in refutation of the Germanic conception of a university as essentially a research-oriented institution. It decried the tendency of American scholars to be more concerned with the content and logic of their subject than with undergraduate students as individuals [p. 268].

Perhaps the last major book to be written on the subject of general education was Bell's The Reforming of General Education (1966) in which he observed that the basic aims of general education programs were to: (1) achieve an ideological consensus; (2) preserve and extend the traditions of Western civilization; (3) strike out against specialism and for a reinstatement of the humanities; and (4) strive for integration of knowledge, for wholeness.

Bell described in detail the general education programs of Harvard, Columbia and Chicago, and left the impression that the status of general education was deteriorating. He noted that it was difficult to distinguish between departmental courses and general education courses, and suggested that general education's uphill battle against the pressures of specialization, professionalism and pluralism was in severe decline -- if not altogether lost. Bell concluded with a "third tier" proposal for general education in which students would master the history and tradition of Western civilization as well as a discipline or disciplines, extend this mastery to "subjects," and then come to the "third tier," the general education element of the program.

General education frequently has been the focus of faculty debate -- sometimes for educational and sometimes for non-educational or "practical"

reasons. The pressures and obstacles have been numerous including outmoded curricula, political log-rolling, inexperienced and overly specialized instructional staff, attempts at mass-produced educational economy, conflict with university reward systems geared to science and the symbols of science, and rigid program standardization in indifferent bureaucracies. Eble (1969) reviewed developments that led to dissatisfactions with the general education program at the University of Utah and found, for example, too few qualified faculty to teach the courses, a failure to adapt to the better preparation of Utah students in high schools, a continuing growth of departmental credit demands, an obvious rigidity in general education "requirements," and an overly extensive use of graduate teaching assistants.

In very large part, the difficulties of general education have come from its sometimes valiant attempts to swim upstream against the major currents of society and against the dominant forces in American colleges and universities. In the latter case, it may be useful in a speculation about future directions in general education to note some of the major trends that appear to have special significance for the future course of general education programs as well.

First to be noted, perhaps, is the expansion in the proportion of youth attending college. Fewer than two million students were enrolled in American colleges and universities in 1945; the figure grew to three and one-half million in 1960, and in 1970, stood in excess of seven million. Not only are more young people in college, but an increasing proportion of young men and women are completing high school and going on to college. In 1955, for example, 62 percent of youth graduated from high school and one half of them went on to college. Today, over 80 percent of youth finish

high school and 55 percent of these graduates go on to college. College attendance, in short, is no longer the privilege of a select, fortunate minority, but the expectation of a growing majority. "Universal" post-secondary education is being discussed in terms typically reserved for elementary and secondary education.

Students coming to college, however, have changed as a casual glance around the contemporary campus will document. Still, changes obvious to the eye may obscure less obvious but more significant changes. Although students may be brighter than earlier generations of college students and come from better secondary schools, the range of abilities from highest to lowest has never been as great. It is also obvious that today's college student tends to be more sophisticated, more urbane, more aware of the social environment in which he lives and less bound by traditional values and ideologies than his predecessors.

Just as there has been a general weakening of the standard orthodoxy and a growing diversity and heterogeneity in value systems in society at large, the college campus has become more pluralistic. Societal trends have been exacerbated by the entry of new student populations not previously served by higher education. Students are taught by faculty members who themselves come from diverse backgrounds and subscribe to a wide range of values.

And, of course, the missions of colleges and universities have themselves become more pluralistic. Instruction goes on in institutions in which undergraduate education must compete with graduate education, basic and applied research and a variety of other professional and public service activities. Just as it is difficult to obtain consensus in society at large, the clash of competing interests and the conflict of disparate values is more common on the college campus.

One must also note the rise of professional values and the power of professionalism in colleges and universities and the growing emphasis on the disciplines with a decline in concern for the liberal arts as instruments of human development. Because the reward structure of the university has tended to be based on and governed by professional rather than organizational values, faculty members have tended to concentrate on those activities most congruent with professional concerns. Increasing emphasis has been placed on the creation of new knowledge, less on its transmission; more value has been assigned to publication of one's findings and less to the synthesis and integration of the work of others; and greater attention is given the classroom as a place to spot and develop future scholars in the discipline, while there is less apparent interest in the role of colleges and universities in developing students as persons. Resulting is a paradox in which colleges and universities -- with the strongest, ablest, best published, most highly qualified faculties of all time -- are unable to generate complimentary accolades in the area of undergraduate education.

The growing strength of the academic department is related to the growth in professionalism as well as to the growth in size of colleges and universities. The department is an organization of professionals, governed by professional values, standards and traditions. As professionalism has gained strength in the university, the academic department has been one of the primary beneficiaries. Moreover, as universities have grown in size, it has become necessary to delegate, to decentralize, and to grant increasing autonomy to the major operating units of the university. Departments have gained economic and political as well as ideological strength in the process.

Finally, it must be noted that there is less consensus on means and ends in higher education. The successes of the past have led society to a dependency

on colleges and universities as instruments of power. Faculty members know the university has an unparalleled capacity to advance the cause of the disciplines and professions and to create new knowledge. Increasing numbers of students are less concerned with "making it" in conventional academic or societal terms and more obsessed with understanding themselves as persons. There is little evidence to suggest that students, faculty, administrators and society at large are near discovery of a common ground on these matters and the probability of a continuing if not a growing disparity is substantial.

Perhaps it is also interesting to speculate on that which has not changed. What in this time of turbulance on college and university campuses has remained firm? The answer, of course, is that very little change has come about in the undergraduate curriculum. Although there have been some minor modifications and a likely strengthening of professional standards, general education programs as well as other aspects of the curriculum have remained essentially the same. Along related lines, the techniques of college instruction have not changed greatly, with the three-credit course, the fixed-length semester or term, normative grading, lecture, discussion and laboratories continuing as the essential elements. Those changes that have come about in general education have, for the most part, been token or surface changes. A review of undergraduate education by Dressel (1968) did suggest that new instructional approaches such as independent study, honors programs, integrative seminars, new "climates" for leadership, experimentation in grading the examination systems, study and travel abroad, work-study programs and social and community service experiences were being tried on some campuses. A comparison of undergraduate curricula changes between 1957 and 1967 in 322 institutions offering liberal arts programs, however, indicated very little change in the essential framework and in the

basic assumptions of the general education programs during this period (Dressel & DeLisle, 1969). Those changes that were identified tended, in the main, to be minor procedural adjustments:

1. Formal requirements in English composition, literature, and speech decreased;

2. Foreign language requirements increased, with two years (or the equivalent) being by far the most common requirement;

3. The use of proficiency tests for meeting requirements in writing, speech, and foreign language increased;

4. Requirements in philosophy and religion were reduced with these subjects more frequently appearing as options in a distribution requirement;

5. The specification of mathematics as a requirement or an option increased;

6. There was some tendency to reduce physical education requirements and to eliminate credits and grades for it;

7. Basic and general requirements remained at approximately 37 percent of the degree requirements and were roughly divided into 17 percent for humanities and 10 percent each for social and natural sciences.

But Morison, writing in a 1970 issue of Daedalus, observed: "Many of us who had such a liberal education are grateful for the experience and feel that it has enriched our outlook on life. Whether it has made us better husbands, fathers, business executives, or citizens remains an open question. What is clear, however, is the fact that general education has fallen upon hard times [p. 619]."

Morison went on to observe that general education is failing, among other reasons, because it gives students an unrealistic, limited, and too favorable view of society as it now is, and that it actively discourages students from learning how to change or reform the existing order. He also noted that while students do not find particular vocational or professional

relevance in general education programs, neither do they find experiences that provides them with a sense of personal value or meaning.

The vulnerability of general education programs also has been pointed out by Shoben, who has speculated that "contemporary culture is caught between two major revolutions, one nearing completion and the other just beginning [1970, p. 32]." He concludes with the observation that patch-work tinkering with the liberal arts or general education curriculum will accomplish little of anything of significance and that only a fresh start will restore constructive vitality.

In his recent and highly controversial book, The Greening of America, Charles A. Reich suggested three major periods in the evolution of the "new culture." Perhaps at some risk, one might suggest three periods in the twentieth century evolution of higher education curricula. During the first quarter of the century, for example, many college curricula still held out the vision of the liberally educated gentlemen, the tutoring of future leaders and potential opinion setters in a growing democracy. By comparison, the social institutions were weak and the communication mechanisms were crude. Preservation and extension of a common culture was an important business, for although America prided herself in having no kings and princes, the small, select portion of the nation's young enrolled in institutions of higher learning represented in a real sense the annointed, educated for positions of power and authority in the major social institutions and professions. The attempts of general education to strive for an ideological concensus, to concentrate on Western civilization, to emphasize the humanities and to integrate and synthesize knowledge were perhaps most appropriate and successful in this era.

A second period might be suggested to have emerged in tandem with the growth of the modern industrial state, certainly in evidence prior to World War II but overwhelmingly obvious since that time. This period was, and is, an era of production and performance. McConnell, writing in 1944, suggested that the fundamental elements of general education programs should be expressed not as fields of knowledge, but as the way in which educated men might properly be expected to behave, or in terms of <u>performance</u> (American Council on Education, 1944, p. 7). Shoben reinforced this view some quarter of a century later when he held that "industrial cultures, regardless of their politics, focus on problems of producing and delivering the goods and services that are defined as real wealth. The values of this focus crystalize around such characteristics as self-discipline, a prudent and foresightful orientation toward the future, work and economic success, and competitive striving. Institutionally, organizational patterns are judged primarily by the degree to which they support productivity rather than by the quality of participation that they invoke... [Shoben, 1970, pp. 32-33]." The common denominator that general education sought to provide not only made better engineers, businessmen, clergy, physicians, scientists, journalists and lawyers, but it also provided the "standardization" and interchangability that proved so immensely functional in the modern industrial state.

The outlines of a third period, presently emerging, remain clear to the view of most observers. What does seem evident is that it <u>is</u> emerging. Although Chickering in his 1969 award-winning book still talked, as did McConnell, of performance, he spoke of it in a different dimension. While McConnell (American Council on Education, 1944) focused on matters of communication through writing and speaking, of building social relationships and working cooperatively, Chickering spoke of developing autonomy, managing emotions and establishing identity.

Shoben (1970) has gone further to suggest:

> A new revolution, the post-industrial revolution, has struck. For large numbers of Americans, relative affluence and basic political freedoms are no longer goals to be striven for; they are established and can be taken for granted. The ethic of production has lost its force, and the institutions, the norms and the reward systems of industrialism seem antiquated and constrictive. What matters is less success and security and much more the experience of joy, the stretching of personal consciousness, the free expression of self [pp. 33-342].

Although few see clearly even the broad outlines -- let alone the precise detail -- of the "third period", two points are evident: society and its institutions of higher learning are in a period of rapid change; and the undergraduate curriculum -- especially the general education portion -- must also change.

The reformulation of general education programs must recognize the substantial changes that have taken place in American higher education during recent decades, for it is unreasonable to suppose that all of society and the bulk of the university can change while general education programs remain set in concrete. The assumptions on which general education programs rest must be reexamined and tested. Can general education programs reasonably be expected to achieve an ideological consensus in a period of growing societal pluralism? Can general education emphasize the extension of the traditions of Western civilization when it is obvious to all, especially the young, that the boundaries of contemporary culture extend far beyond this restricted definition? Must the humanities be the instrument for striking out against science and technology, or should the aim to be infuse our technological culture and its scientists with more genuine humanness?

Speculation about the general education programs of the future might begin with pointing up certain qualities that should <u>not</u> be present.

It is clear that the rigid self-righteousness of inflexible course requirements of the past is not a high priority quality for the general education model of the future. Neither should general education continue to serve as the institutional talent screening device, the major contribution of which is to weed out those students somehow overlooked by the admissions officer. The general education program model of the future should not place primary emphasis on the creation of an efficient production line to mass produce lower division instruction so that savings can be reinvested in upper division and graduate education. Neither should general education programs be distinguished primarily by the number of stipends they provide to beginning graduate students.

New organizational alternatives must be devised in the general education programs of the future. Single administrative units for general education -- such as general or basic colleges -- bring on a variety of problems including second class status for the faculty, conflicts with professional values and interests, risks of impersonal instruction and rigid course requirements, to mention a few. The alternative of leaving general education to the departments brings different but equally serious difficulties. There is no obvious answer, but the creation of a series of contrasting general education institutes or the use of openly competitive lower division cluster colleges may present an interesting contrast to the status quo.

Professionalism has so captured colleges and universities, including the liberal arts, that the fight between general education and "specialism" can no longer continue. Those in the disciplines and professions must finally decide whether they really wish a curricular monopoly and if not, they must move to support a redifinition and revitalization of general education. In

turn, the current closed market in general education -- single source suppliers -- must also be broken with the introduction of a wider range of competitive and attractive alternatives.

In the end, future programs of general education must ask the question: Whose interests are served? Hopefully, the answer is congruent with a commitment to future generations of youth and to the society of which they, as well as the institutions they attend, are a part. Achieving these ends must rank high on the now well-filled agenda for academic reform.

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limit itself to essential objectives and not try to "over-define" itself.

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Discusses themes that run through the modern university -- preoccupation with means, division into disciplines, the triad of teaching, research, and public service, and academic freedom -- and the evolution of the modern university to this state.

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Cites eight trends in general education between 1955-1965: (1) decline in importance of functional education, (2) increase in amount of general education, (3) movement away from concentrating general education in the first two years of college, (4) movement toward greater election and specialization within general education programs, (5) greater emphasis on English composition and comprehension, (6) increase in education for international awareness, (7) consolidation of the position of the social sciences as third area of general education, and (8) general education remains entrenched in American higher education.

Shoben, E. J., Jr. The liberal arts and contemporary society: The 1970's. Liberal Education, 1970, 56, 28-38.

The author suggests that our present culture is caught between two major revolutions: (1) the industrial revolution with its emphasis upon production, self discipline and competition; and (2) the post-industrial revolution with emphasis on "the experience of joy, the stretching of personal consciousness, the free expression of self." What is needed, Shoben suggests, is a major overhauling of the liberal arts curriculum, which takes cognizance of the post-industrial era.

Vallance, Theodore R. The guiding assumptions of liberal arts programming. Journal of Higher Education, 1963, 33, 181-190.

The author suggests the possibility of a reverse order in the normal liberal arts program sequence that would offer each student a chance, from the very beginning, to move ahead as fast as he could in a selected field of interest. Assumptions in support of current practices are examined and alternative assumptions are suggested. Actual program models are introduced by way of illustration.

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Points to the many differences in state-supported institutions in areas of general education credit hour requirements and distribution of the general education program among the disciplines. Suggests that the cause for these differences lies in the problem of defining general education. Reviews philosophical and historical development of general education. Advises experimentation in instruction and administration of the general education program, followed by continual review.

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Books

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The Council's Committee on a Design for General Education outlines in detail some overall objectives of general education within the military. The Committee offers specific curricula which it designed to achieve these objectives. The purpose of the endeavor was to assist in the transfer of credits from the military to colleges and universities. This work, even though published in 1944, may serve as a helpful source of definition of objectives within general education.

Bell, D. The reforming of general education. New York: Columbia University Press, 1966.

David Truman writes in the forward to this volume: "To all but the least attentive it is apparent that liberal education, in general, and what is loosely called general education, in particular, confront a complex challenge. If this challenge is to be met, it will require close examination of unexpressed assumptions and prevailing practices." The author writes: "What I shall argue...is that in this day and age, and even more in the coming day and age, the

distinctive function of the college must be to teach modes of conceptualization, explanation, and verification of knowledge." This book about Columbia College is a "comprehensive examination" of the general-liberal education matter. One of the many virtues of the book is that it makes clear that the conceptualizations of "liberal education" and "university education" are incredibly complicated matters.

Chickering, A. W. Education and identity. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1969.

An in-depth study of the formal and informal institutional mission of colleges and universities. The student should become the focus and it is Chickering's aim to identify the effects of higher education upon development of students as persons. Seven major dimensions of change are analyzed: developing competence, managing emotions, developing autonomy, establishing identity, freeing interpersonal relationships, developing purpose, and developing integrity.

Dressel, P. L. College and university curriculum. Berkeley: McCutchen, 1968.

Collegiate curricula contain such a variety of courses that a sense of coherence and unity is absent. This volume is directed to faculty members, entreating them to develop a coherent curriculum, and interpret it to the students. Concern must be given to the total educational program, divorced from the restrictions of the specialized disciplines. Finally, this volume attempts to provide a structure for the study of curriculum, and a pattern for the solution of problems.

Dressel, P. L. & DeLisle, F. H. Undergraduate curriculum trends. Washington: American Council on Education, 1969.

Comprehensive study of course offerings and curricular requirements in a large number of colleges and universities. Discussion deals with the relationship of elective courses and learning experiences such as study abroad, honors programs, field work, and independent study to the curriculum. Despite the need for innovation, Dressel and DeLisle maintain that many of the changes in curricula too often merely amount to "tinkering."

Dressel, P. L., & Mayhew, L. B. General education: Explorations in evaluation. Washington: American Council on Education, 1954.

Study of the relationship between general education and evaluation procedures. Analyzes the objectives of the various divisions within general education -- social sciences communications, science, and the humanities -- and the objectives of critical thinking and personality development. For the most part, the study "found that all too little is being done in most general education courses to promote the progress of students toward the objectives inherent in general education.

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As Jencks and Riesman state in this preface to the second edition, this is not so much a book on the "academic revolution" as it is on the "academic professions." The theme of the book deals with the professionalization of higher education. It describes the evolution of the American college and the relationships between the different types of colleges and special interest groups. These relationships are examined from both a sociological and an historical perspective. In conclusion, Jencks and Riesman write that generational conflict seems to be the major threat to the stability and growth of the academic system.

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A discussion of the philosophical, psychological, and social foundations of programs of general education. Analyzes the role of the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences in general education. Deals with the institution's responsibility and procedures to meet the interests and needs of the college student.

Sanford, N. (Ed.). The American college. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1962. (Note especially Katz, J. & Sanford, N. The curriculum in the perspective of the theory of personality development.)

edited by Nevitt Sanford, the book has been called monument (1084). Its theme is that colleges need reforming and that findings drawn from the social sciences are relevant to reform. Thirty social scientists present material. The volume focuses on undergraduate liberal arts education. (An abridged edition is available in paperback.)

Spurr, S. H. Academic degree structures: Innovative approaches. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970.

An historical review of the origins and development of academic degree structures. Analyzes the influence of degree structure upon such aspects of higher education as admissions, curriculum, and enrollment. Alteration of the degree structure may be one approach to revising the general education program. Spurr also offers his own synthesis of "an idealized and generalized system of degree structures for American higher education."

Stanley O. Ikenberry received his Ph.D. in 1960 from Michigan State University. He served on the staff of that university from 1958 to 1962, first in the Office of Evaluation Services and subsequently in the Office of Institutional Research. In 1962, he moved to West Virginia University as Assistant to the Provost for Institutional Research and Assistant Professor of Education. Dr. Ikenberry was appointed dean of West Virginia's newly formed College of Human Resources and Education in 1965. He joined Penn State's Center for the Study of Higher Education as its Associate Director in September 1969. Dr. Ikenberry's primary research interest is in the general area of governance, including organizational structure and functioning in the complex university.

The Center for the Study of Higher Education at The Pennsylvania State University was authorized by the Board of Trustees in January 1969. Dr. G. Lester Anderson, its director, was appointed the following April. The present staff of the center numbers 23 individuals including four full-time researchers, three visiting researchers and a cadre of advanced graduate students and supporting staff.

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